

## ASIAN/ASIAN-AMERICAN THEOLOGY – CONSULTATION

Topic: Faith and Freedom in Asia  
 Convener: Edmund Chia, Australian Catholic University  
 Moderator: Akhil Thomas, Harvard University  
 Presenters: Huili Kathy Stout, University of Dayton  
 Antonio D. Sison, Catholic Theological Union  
 Christina Astorga, University of Portland

In line with the convention's theme of "Freedom," the Asian/Asian American Theology Consultation constituted a panel of three speakers to address how (un)freedom is expressed in three different Asian contexts and eras. The first discussed how China in general struggled with freedom in the early twentieth century, the second how Japanese Christians survived oppression from the seventeenth till the nineteenth centuries, and the third the resistance that arose as a result of the subjugation of Filipinas in the colonial era. Together the panel offered a quick glimpse of challenges that Asians encounter, as well as opportunities for bringing forth new theologies arising from the realities and struggles of the people, especially those at the margins.

The first paper was presented by Huili Kathy Stout, who recently defended her doctoral thesis at University of Dayton. Her paper was entitled "Three Competing Visions for Freedom in Republican-era China." She begins by introducing what modern China looked like at the beginning of the twentieth century Republican era. It stood at a crossroads as it fought for survival and freedom from the western powers, Japanese imperialism, and domestic weakness. Among diverse visions competing among intellectuals of the day, she posited that one can discern three main currents, i.e., the liberal, the Communist, and the Chinese humanist. These currents remain vibrant competing visions in China's political and spiritual life even today. She then went on to compare them by examining the thoughts of their representative thinkers: Hu Shi, Mao Zedong, and John C. H. Wu. The historical examination shed light on the challenges yet to be resolved in China's future.

The second paper was presented by Antonio D. Sison, the Vatican II Professor of Systematic Theology at Catholic Theological Union. His paper was entitled "Silent Inculturation: Faith, Unfreedom, and Japan's Hidden Christians." He began by recounting how Japan's *Kakure Kirishitan* or "Hidden Christians" heroically defied and outlived the great persecution of the Tokugawa shogunate (1630-1867) as they found incredible ways of preserving their Christian faith under the shadow of torture and martyrdom. In the crucible of suppression and suffering, Kakure faith birthed religious iconography, prayers, liturgies, even a sacred text, from fragmentary recollections of missionary catechism and biblical narratives interwoven with Japanese Buddhist-Shinto influences. He then engaged with the question of whether inculturation—as against "acculturation"—is realizable in the unfreedom of terror. He went on to discuss at length the contributions of Kakure faith to a more liberative critical reflection on inculturation.

The third paper was presented by Christina Astorga, professor of theology at University of Portland. Her paper was entitled "Postcolonial Imagination: Towards a Postcolonial Filipina Feminist Theology." She began by stating that in the age of

antiquity, the Filipina held an honored and respected place in society, but all that was suppressed and erased by the imposition of the Iberian-Catholic colonization. But through the years, the Filipina spirit of old refused to be silenced, and continued to define who the Filipina is in her struggle and resistance. While religion was the site of colonization, so it is also a site of decolonization. She then proposed a Postcolonial Filipina Feminist theology that is premised on the iconoclastic image of Mary in her Magnificat that deconstructs the Filipina woman narrative shaped by a Filipino Marian culture which promoted passivity, subservience, and victimhood.

The lively discussion which followed began with a comment by one of the attendees talking about the underexplored devotional practices of Filipina women brought to attention by Christina Astorga's presentation. This was followed by general comments connecting aspects of Astorga's paper, especially the focus on Filipina women's voices, with the voices of the silent Japanese Christians, the subject matter of Antonio Sison's paper. The discussion concluded with a conversation about the role of inculturation in Asia and Kathy Stout's insights on the political state in Taiwan.

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